(c) Export promotion meausres are continuously being taken by the Government through changes in policies and procedures for providing an export friendly environment, involvement of States in export promotion and consultation with trade and industry. A number of steps have been taken to promote exports which include lowering of interest rates on export credit, reduction in transation cost through decetralisation and simplification of procedures and various other measures as enumerated in the Exim Policy. Steps have also been taken to promote exports through multilateral and bilateral initiatives, identification of thrust sectors and focus regions. The Government is according high priority to exports and all necessary steps are being taken to put exports on high growth trajectory.

Increase in Trade Deficit

2329. DR. B.B. DUTTA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the increase in country's trade deficit during April-August, 1998;

(b) the reasons for widening gap between exports and imports? and

(c) the details of measures taken by Government to increase exports?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) As per the provisional data received from the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics (DGCI & S), the trade deficit during April—August 1998-99 has increased to US$ 3871.5 million from US$ 2550.2 million during the same period last year.

(b) The widening of gap has been due both to a slowdown in export growth as well as an increase in imports especially that of gold and silver.

Post-Harvest Mango Care

2330. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether attention of the Government has been drawn to the news-items which appeared in the Economic Times, dated the 10th August, 1998 captioned "Low post-harvest care denies Indian mangoes shelf space on foreign markets";

(b) if so, what is the reaction of Government to the observations made therein and facts of the matter;

(c) the details of action taken/proposed to improve and up grade post-harvest care for mangoes to ensure substantial export; and

(d) the details of action plan formulated for the current year and 9th Plan for upgradation of post-harvest facilities for export of fruits?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) The Government is aware of the inadequate post-harvest management practices in the horticulture sector which also has an impact on the exports. Some of the steps taken to improve the post-harvest management in horticultural sector and to enhance exports inter-alia, include:—

(i) Providing assistance for raising small and large nurseries for prodcution of good quality planting materal, upgradation of technical knowhow of farmers through demonstrations, trainings and publicity, rejuvenation of old orchards, area expansion, supply of minikits for vegetables, improving productivity and training of farmers under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Integrated Development of Tropical, Temperate and Arid Zone fruits;

(ii) Provision of soft loans for setting up of grading/processing centres, transport vehicles, precooling units,